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Tapestries - Venice

PRIVATE EXHIBITION OF
THE GOBELINS TAPESTRIES
OF THE MARQUISE DE VENEVELLE

THE COMPLETE SET OF FIFTEEN TAPESTRIES, THE FIRST AND ORIGINAL PANELS ILLUSTRATING THE HISTORY OF DON QUIXOTE AFTER THE PAINTINGS BY CHARLES COYPEL, WITH BORDERS DESIGNED BY JEAN-BAPTISTE BELIN DE FONTENAY¹ AND CLAUDE AUDRAN,² WOVEN AT THE GOBELINS FOR THE GALLERY OF THE DUC D'ANTIN³ BY JEAN JANS AND JEAN LE FEBVRE,⁴ AND NOW THE PROPERTY OF THE MARQUIS DE VENE^{VE}ELLE.

IN THE PRIVATE EXHIBITION ROOMS
OF THE ANDERSON GALLERIES
PARK AVENUE AND 59TH STREET

PRIVATE EXHIBITION OF
THE GOBELINS TAPESTRIES
OF THE MARQUISE DE VENEVELLE

THE COMPLETE SET OF FIFTEEN TAPESTRIES, THE FIRST AND ORIGINAL PANELS ILLUSTRATING THE HISTORY OF DON QUIXOTE AFTER THE PAINTINGS BY CHARLES COYPEL, WITH BORDERS DESIGNED BY JEAN-BAPTISTE BELIN DE FONTENAY¹ AND CLAUDE AUDRAN,² WOVEN AT THE GOBELINS FOR THE GALLERY OF THE DUC D'ANTIN³ BY JEAN JANS AND JEAN LE FEBVRE,⁴ AND NOW THE PROPERTY OF THE MARQUISE DE VENEVELLE.

THE family of d'Espagne de Vénevelles, seigneurs d'Espagne, d'Annay de Vénevelles, de Coutaines, with the titles of Marquis and Comte de Vénevelles, are of knightly origin and one of the oldest families of the ancient province of Maine. The first Vénevelle known to history appears to be Herbert d'Espagne de Vénevelles, Equerry, in the year 1287. Then following a long line of succession of equeries, knights and gentlemen of the King's Chamber, contracting alliances with the most illustrious families of the kingdom and quartering the arms of France either by alliance or by concession, Henri Jacques Louis d'Espagne, Marquis de Vénevelle, a soldier of renown and Knight of the Royal and Military Order of St. Louis, received the privilege of riding in the Royal coach. Edouard d'Espagne, Comte de Vénevelle, married Louise Agathe de Rouvroy in 1803. It is about that time to which the family tradition ascribes the first knowledge of the tapestries of Don Quixote. Edouard d'Espagne, the ancestor of the present Marquis, received as part of his dowry from the rich and powerful Rouvroy family, a mansion at Lille where the Don Quixote tapestries formed the chief adornment.

¹ Jean-Baptiste Bélin de Fontenay, at the Gobelins, 1699-1715, a pupil of Jean Baptiste Monnoyer and his successor at the Gobelins, was flower painter to the King and enjoyed a position of considerable importance. He was assisted in his creations by his son, who succeeded him in 1715.

² Claude Audran, the foremost ornament painter of his time, at the Gobelins, 1699-1734. Anton Watteau assisted in his early decorations.

³ Louis-Antoine de Pardaillan de Gondrin, Duc d'Antin, 1665-1736, son of the Marquise and Marquis de Montespan; celebrated courtier and favorite of Louis XIV; Royal Superintendent of Works, 1708-1736.

⁴ Jean Jans, 1668-1723 and Jean Le Febvre, 1699-1736, the master weavers of high loom tapestries during the best epoch at the Gobelins.

Edouard followed the exiled Louis XVIII to England and upon his return at the Restoration in 1815, the tapestries were brought to Paris and installed in a mansion, Rue de Varennes, from where they were removed to the Avenue d'Iéna by Fernand, Marquis de Véneville, the father-in-law of the present owner. The tapestries are to-day practically in the same condition as when they left the Gobelins, having never been exposed to brilliant sunlight, to dust or to the disastrous touch of the curious.

The present possessor, the Marquise de Véneville, née Princesse de Croy, has followed the family tradition in the great care and affection shown to the magnificent tapestries. The Marquise herself descends from the greatest names of France, amongst whom the Duchesse de Tourzelle is celebrated in history as the governess of the Royal children and the companion of the Royal family in their ill-fated flight to Varennes.


Comparatively few lovers of eighteenth century art have had the privilege of seeing on the walls of the Palais de Véneville, Paris, this most entrancing set of Gobelins tapestries. But the two greatest authorities on the art of the Gobelins, both directors of the looms, the late Jules Guiffrey⁵, and notably Maurice Fenaille⁶, the author of the standard opus, have emphasized the supreme importance of the Véneville tapestries, and Fenaille has placed them at the head of his treatise on the Don Quixote hangings, Chapter IX, and has illustrated the first series by reproducing nine of the tapestries (pages 156, 160, 172, 180, 182, 194).

The beauty of design of "these masterpieces of the textile art", as Guiffrey calls them, woven on a "yellow mosaic" ground in harmonious polychromy, is enhanced by the same perfect state of preservation noted by M. Fenaille when he examined the tapestries in 1900. Their art-historical importance cannot be illustrated more adequately than by referring to M. Fenaille's prodigious information.

M. Fenaille inadvertently overlooked four of the fifteen panels and counted on several occasions eleven as belonging to the collection of the Marquis de Véneville. The four panels mentioned by M. Fenaille as missing from the Véneville collection, though carefully recorded in his extract from the "Notebook"

⁵ Jules Guiffrey, former director of the Gobelins, and member of the Institute. "History of Tapestries since the Middle Ages", Paris, 1886; "Les Gobelins et Beauvais", Paris, 1907.

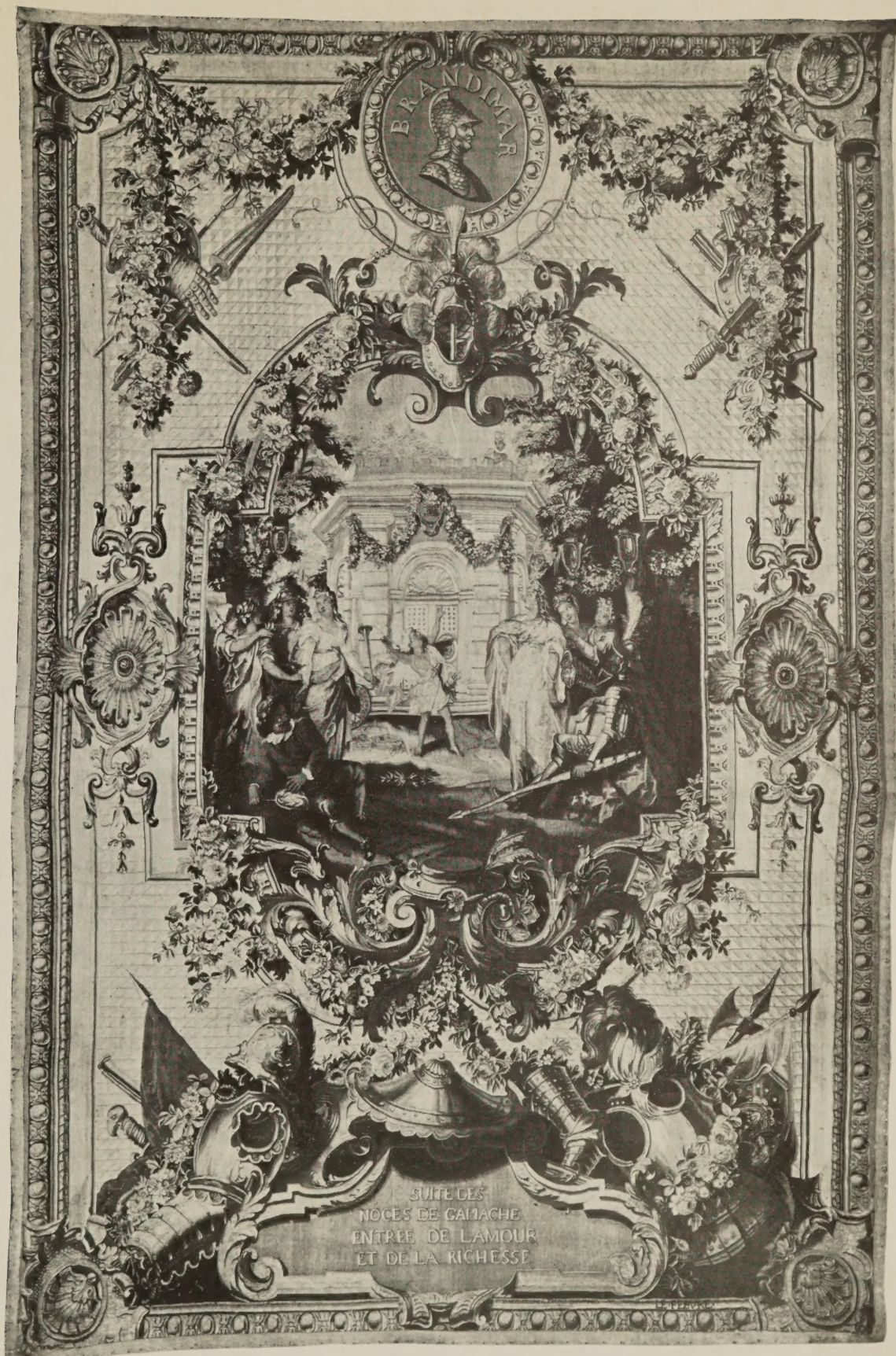
⁶ Maurice Fenaille, "Etat Général des Tapisseries de la Manufacture des Gobelins, depuis son Origine jusqu'à Nos Jours, 1600-1900", Paris, 1904.



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DEPARTURE OF SANCHO FOR THE ISLAND OF BARATARIA
 CARTOON BY COYPEL ALENTOUR BY BÉLIN DE FONTENAY
 WOVEN BY LE FÉVRE



SEQUEL OF THE MARRIAGE FEAST OF GAMACHE
 CARTOON BY COYPEL ALENTOUR BY AUDRAN
 WOVEN BY LE FÉVRE

[NUMBER 14]

of the Duc d'Antin, were, at the time of his visit to the Palais de Vénéville, on the walls of the dining room, which for some unaccountable reason remained locked for the savant in search of information. No doubt, if M. Fenaille agrees to re-edit his fine folios—now a great rarity in the book market—he will make this important correction.

The first mention of the celebrated hangings of Don Quixote appears in "Comptes des Batimens" (Accounts of the Royal Building Operations)—"December 1st, 1714 to Sieur Fontenay, the painter, the sum of 1100 livres in payment of a picture representing Don Quixote, who believes in receiving the Knight-hood at the Hostelry, [Number 2 of the Vénéville set] which he made to be executed in tapestry by the Royal Manufactory of the Gobelins."

Though the paintings serving as models for the Don Quixote tapestries were all executed by the youthful Charles Coypel⁷, the wording of the above reference permitted the erroneous assumption that Bélin de Fontenay had designed the subject besides the "aléntour", as the elaborate border design was called.

It was customary at the Gobelins to pay a higher price for the "aléntour" than for the subject itself, which was restricted in scale to allow for the borders rich with ornaments and flowers. While Bélin de Fontenay received 1100 livres for his border design, young Coypel was rewarded with 400 livres for his first Don Quixote cartoon.

The tapestries were under way at the Gobelins in 1717, as the "Mercure de France" reports:—"A piece representing the history of Don Quixote was admired by Czar Peter the Great, who was presented with the original drawing by the King."

From 1716 to 1718 the Building Accounts report payments for the execution of cartoons by Coypel, Bélin de Fontenay and Audran⁸, the latter being credited with borders for the larger panels (Numbers 13, 14 and 15 of the Vénéville set), while Bélin's designs surround Coypel's⁹ representations on all other panels. Coypel's reward reached 550 livres for his paintings in 1718.

Pages 190 to 194, in Fenaille, are devoted to the careful

⁷ Charles Coypel was the son of the painter, Antoine Coypel; a youth of twenty in 1714 and admitted to the Academy in 1715.

⁸ As will be shown later, Audran also designed two flanking borders attached to Numbers 6 and 8 of the series.

⁹ The original cartoons by Coypel with the exception of Number 2 are at the Château de Compiègne. The entire set was engraved by Cochin, Surugue, Beauvais, Poilly and others.

record of the Véneville tapestries with their legends under the heading:—"First Tenture (Hanging), First Alentour (Border)."

According to the article of the "Mercure" quoted previously, several pieces of this series of hangings were in the looms in 1717. At that time the models of the first twelve pictures had been executed and delivered by Charles Coypel.

Bélin de Fontenay had made his border in 1714 (Numbers 1 to 12), and Audran, the larger border in 1717 (Numbers 13 to 15) and the exterior borders for Numbers 6 and 8.

The dimensions of these pieces and their price have been given in several records of the Building Accounts and the "Notebook" of the Duc d'Antin.

"OF THE PIECES OF THIS FIRST WEAVE", says the "Mercure", "THERE IS NO EXAMPLE IN THE POSSESSION OF THE [FRENCH] NATION. The Marquis de Véneville possesses in Paris a collection of eleven pieces [actually fifteen pieces] corresponding exactly with the first pictures of Coypel and also conforming with the two dimensions indicated in the Royal Building Accounts.

"The first border is very narrow and made in three parts, vertically.

"In the centre, the picture by Coypel is enclosed in a frame formed of scrolls and enriched with ornaments of festoons and flowers, crested by a helmet and terminating at the bottom in a barber's bowl or a cuirass.

"Above, a medallion with a profile head of a knight facing right and bearing the inscription of a knight's name taken from the Romances of Knighthood. On both sides of this medallion are arranged garlands of flowers and accessories of armor.

"At the bottom, a cartouche on a blue ground bearing the legend of the picture and surrounded by accessories of armor, cuirass, spur, musket, lances and flags.

"The ground of the tapestry, above and below the picture, is formed by a geometrical disposition of yellow triangles in two tones forming a mosaic.

"The border used by the atelier of Jans varies from that of the atelier Le Febvre. In the first the frame of the picture terminates in a barber's bowl enriched with a plume, and in the second, by a cuirass. All the accessories of armor placed among the flowers vary in the same way according to the atelier.

"The larger encadrement composed for 'The Entrance of the Shepherdesses' (Number 13) and 'The Entrance of Love and Wealth' (Number 14) does not offer any variations. [M. Fenaille again overlooks Number 15, 'Don Quixote Delivered

of Folly', also, in the large border designed by Audran.]] In this 'alentour', the frame of the picture is separated from the border of the tapestry by a beautiful ornament of a rosette from which emanate the mouldings surrounding the picture and the mosaic field.

"Two pilasters composed of a beautiful rosette in the centre, and above and below with armor, swords, etc., on the same mosaic ground frame the piece, 'The False Princess of Micomicon' " (Number 6). (M. Fenaille, as previously explained, failed to see Number 8, which also bears the same exterior border by Audran.)

The following index of fabrication of the first hanging, taken partly from the Véneville tapestries and partly from the "Notebook" of the Duc d'Antin, repeats in footnote, Number 2, the same error in regard to the number of the Véneville tapestries. Numbers 2, 8, 10 and 15 claimed as having formed no part of the collection of the Marquis de Véneville were those concealed in the dining room and the index gives an exact and condensed account of the fifteen tapestries ordered for the Gallery of the Duc d'Antin, and now in the Véneville collection.

The enumeration with their legends given by M. Fenaille has been amplified by the insertions of Numbers 2, 8, 10 and 15.

- 1 Don Quixote guided by Folly and captured by the extravagant love of Dulcinee leaves home to become a Knight Errant.
The medallion of the knight cresting the border bears the inscription, Amadis. Signature at the right, Jans.
- 2 [[Inserted]] Don Quixote believes in receiving the Knighthood in the Hostelry.
The medallion of the knight with inscription Esplandian. Signature, Le Febvre in the baguette at the right.
- 3 Don Quixote asleep fancies fighting a giant and pierces the wine bags.
Medallion of the knight with inscription, Roncevaux. Signature at the right, Jans.
- 4 Don Quixote makes Sancho ask permission to be received by the Duchess.
Medallion of the knight with inscription, Palmerin Dolive. Signature at the right, Jans. (M. Fenaille overlooked the signature which was hidden under the moulding.)
- 5 Don Quixote protects Basile, who marries Quiterie by a ruse of love.
Medallion of the knight with inscription, D. Olivantes. Signature at the right, Jans.
- 6 The false Princess of Micomicon asks Don Quixote to restore her to her throne.
Medallion of the knight bearing the inscription, Le Chevalier Platir. The signature of Le Febvre in the baguette at the right. (M. Fenaille overlooked the signature which was hidden under the moulding.) The two pilasters which frame the tapestry are composed of two motifs of ornaments with swags of various accessories and flowers on a mosaic ground, separated by a beautiful agraffe.

- 7 Don Quixote takes a barber's basin for Mambrin's armet.
The cresting medallion bears the inscription, Florismarte d'Hircanie. Signature at the right, Jans.
- 8 [[Inserted]] The Doloride afflicted with a beard asks Don Quixote to revenge her on the enchanter.
Medallion of the knight with inscription, Amadis de Grece. Signature on the baguette at the right, Le Febvre. Exterior border similar to Number 6.
- 9 Don Quixote taking marionettes for Moors hopes that by conquering them, he is helping two fugitive lovers.
The cresting medallion bears the inscription, J. Belianis. Signature at the bottom, Le Febvre (as overlooked by M. Fenaille), Le Febvre on baguette.
- 10 [[Inserted]] Don Quixote tied to a window by the malice of Maritorne.
Medallion of the knight with inscription, Flortir. Signature at the right, Le Febvre.
- 11 The old Rodrigues approaches Don Quixote at night asking him to avenge her outraged daughter.
Medallion of the knight with inscription, Roland. Signature at the right, Jans.
- 12 Departure of Sancho for the Island of Barataria.
Medallion of the knight with inscription, Claridian. Signature, Le Febvre, at the right. (Escaped M. Fenaille on account of its darkness.)
- 13 Entrance of the Shepherdesses, who dance at the marriage of Gamache.
Inscription on the medallion, Grifon. Signature at the right, Jans.
- 14 Sequel of the marriage feast of Gamache, Entrance of Love and Wealth.
Inscription in the medallion of the knight, Brandimar. Signature at the right, Le Febvre.
- 15 [[Inserted]] Wisdom at last recognized by Don Quixote delivers him of Folly.
Inscription in the medallion of the knight, Astolphe; signature at the right, Jans.

The small tapestries, Numbers 1 to 5, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12 measure about 11 feet 6½ inches by 4 feet 5½ inches; Numbers 6 and 8 measure about 11 feet 6½ inches by 8 feet 7¼ inches; Numbers 13 to 15 measure about 11 feet 6½ inches by 7 feet 5 inches.

The complete index of the entire Don Quixote series, page 281, Fenaille, is headed by the Vénéville tapestries.

The late Jules Guiffrey, in his "History of Tapestries since the Middle Ages", who "considered the Don Quixote series the most justly celebrated as they represented the most frankly decorative and characteristic type of tapestry in the eighteenth century", also mentions that the National Furniture Collection has no example of the original border which solely belongs to the Marquis de Vénéville. Plate Number 27 is an illustration of the border of the Vénéville tapestries, Numbers 13, 14 and 15.

Guiffrey also, in his book "Les Gobelins et Beauvais", illustrated his dithyrambic account of the Don Quixote tapestries with the Vénéville tapestries, Numbers 5 and 6, on pages 47 and 49.

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